

two of a crime by dykenance

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Banter, Confessions, Crime Fighting, Enemies to Friends to Lovers, F/F, Flirting, Hurt/Comfort, Investigations, Sharing a Bed, Swearing, barb is dead in this too :/ so srry besties, i fit in a tiny bit of stoner!robin, im a softie i dont have it in me, there's some bloody descriptions but nothing crazy

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Summary:

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Please." A frown takes over Robin's face. "This is all a lead-up to me telling you that I liked you, beneath it all."

"I-I like you too, Robin. I mean, it surprised me, but - "

A pained look wrecks the girl's face, and suddenly lead drowns Nancy's insides.

She'd never spoken that kind of thing out loud.

or, an angsty little number in which robin and nancy, academic rivals, work together to hunt down a killer terrorizing hawkins

two of a crime

Author's Note:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4z3vrdnETLZUVZF3guqMmM?si=b9112d14172f4508> link to my spotify playlist for this story <3

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Barb stole away a lot of Nancy when she died. The rest rotted.

This is the sixth funeral in a month; Barb had the honor of going first. Honor may not be the right word here; novelty, perhaps, fits more soundly.

Her body was found in her room late after her parents' weekly game night, a night they'd expected her to be over at the Wheeler's. The same night that Nancy had convinced her to third wheel her date with Steve. The night she'd let her walk home alone.

It wasn't Nancy's fault, but the guilt ate her alive at night. The what-if of Barb's fate. Questioning every minute of the night, every action and reaction, the course of events that could've ended differently if Nancy had kept her word. Or at least followed the basic code of *never* letting another girl walk alone.

Barb made it home, though; it wasn't the walk that killed her. Someone followed her. Found an open window and crept up on her and stabbed her to death. Maybe that wouldn't have happened if she'd stayed the night with Nancy like she was meant to.

Barb's parents forgave her almost immediately. It felt like shit. Now she was alone in hating her every move.

Nancy blinks out of a daze, eyes glazing over as more flowers are placed upon a casket, a mother's hands are squeezed, her anguish never healed, and as it all happens yet again they still can't figure out who the hell is killing all these kids. Every second of it is festering in

her mind. For all they know, the killer could be among them, getting off on the pain they caused, watching the result of another sickening round of play. It's too much for Nancy to handle.

She slips away from the reception that follows, the pleasantries and refreshments and *bullshit* as another kid lies dead, and storms out into the biting November air. Gripping the sleeves of her sweater tightly, she stumbles forward until she catches herself on a telephone pole, the fibers of the wood digging through the threads. Her eyes hone in on tiny etches in front of her, catching her attention in an almost dreamlike fashion, until she can feel herself crying.

All that's left of years of a friendship is a shell, one ebbing away and volcanoing in Nancy and Nancy alone. No one else knew what they shared. No one else understood.

But everyone was losing.

And she can't do this anymore.

"Hey, where are you going?"

Nancy startles, barren soul launching from her body, and turns to see a girl standing across the parking lot. Shivering in a thin black button-up, hands buried in her sides. Robin Buckley.

They had a silent rivalry - both were eager to be valedictorian at graduation. This year was the final battling ground between their GPAs.

Robin was also friendly with Barb, much to Nancy's distaste.

Aiming for a snarky response, Nancy lands on a flat, "I can't - " the words claw at her throat coming out, and she presses her lips together and forces a deep inhale until she can finish, "I can't be here."

Robin folds in on herself, bouncing on her tiptoes to avoid going numb. God, the jokes make themselves. "Well, do you have somewhere to be?" Every syllable paints a small gray cloud in the air.

"Not really, why?"

“You shouldn’t be alone. And, uh, I don’t want to be here either.”

The glare weighs down Nancy’s face by several thousand pounds.
“So, you need to catch a ride or something?”

“Uh, well, I don’t - I mean -”

“Listen, I’d just like to get in my car and leave, if possible. It’s freezing. Do you need a ride?”

Robin’s tongue pokes out of cherry-chapped lips to wet them. “Yeah. Yes, I guess.” She jogs across the parking lot, and Nancy almost chews her out for not wearing a jacket, just to pick a fight, but decides it’s too much effort and slumps into her seat.

Daring a glance at her passenger, she finds Robin’s flushed cheeks, the girl breathing an immediate sigh of relief at the slight warmth compared to outside, her arm gripping the rest between them as she adjusts in the seat.

Nancy clears her throat. “So where do you want to go?”

“Could you drop me at the library?”

“What do you need to go there for?”

“Uh...” a frown nestles between Robin’s brows, “to study, I guess?”

“With no books?”

“I really just don’t feel like being home.”

Well, it’s something they could agree on. “Oh. Alright.”

“Cool.”

The ride is relatively peaceful; they let the top hits of the year play in the silence between them, and Robin hops out when Nancy’s barely finished parking to call her parents and let them know she’s alive, or whatever.

Once inside, Robin settles into a cozy corner of a bookshelf, flipping through some scientific magazine. Nancy quietly slips past her and decides to take on her own little project.

Hawkins rarely faces crimes worse than minor theft, so it isn't difficult to find old articles on homicides and violent crimes. Nancy spends about twenty minutes scrolling through these clippings, looking for any relevance to the current predicament. Most are domestic crimes, though, prompted by a cheating spouse or abuse.

After returning the bits she viewed, she makes her way through a few more aisles, following the familiar catalog to find information on serial murders.

"That looks delightful," Robin notes after Nancy settles across from her at a table, flipping open one of the volumes detailing histories and patterns of these killings. "This a school project?"

"You could say that."

"Pretty sick of your teachers to assign such a topic right now."

"Totally."

Nancy runs her finger along the page to stay focused, leaning on her knuckles, trying to note any patterns with their current situation. It's difficult because the current murderer utilized a few methods of his trade thus far - four stabblings, one throat slit, one hung. No particular tokens or signature pieces are taken from the scene. Across the table, Robin flips her magazine shut, and Nancy thinks she's getting ready to leave, but instead, she drags one of Nancy's articles over to her side.

"What are you doing?"

"I'll answer when you tell me what this research is about, Wheeler."

"I don't really owe you that."

"Hm. You know, I'd usually say that's fair, and might not even really care, to be honest, but I've also watched our classmates get picked off one by one, so I'd say you do a little bit."

Choosing to ignore this, Nancy sighs and tries harder to focus on the words in front of her, wrapping her head around each syllable so hopefully, Robin stops staring at her.

“Wheeler.”

“ *What* ?”

Robin pushes the book back in front of Nancy, folding her hands on top of it, forcing herself into her line of vision. “I know I don’t really know you, but whatever this is, I don’t think it’s healthy.”

“I don’t really care, no offense.”

“None taken. But, um, maybe we could talk about that Lit project now, or - “

“There’s no ‘we’ here, Robin.” Nancy finally lifts her eyes from the page. “I’m doing this alone.”

Robin deadpans, “That was *very* Hollywood. What was on your watchlist last night?”

“Shut up.”

She doesn’t budge. “What is ‘this’ then? What are you doing?”

Nancy snatches up the books and, without looking back, throws them on the return cart and storms out the front door. If only that girl would mind her own business.

She only stops when she reaches the car and hears a call of, “Wait!” And really, she wants nothing more than to ignore this, hop in, and drive the hell away. Closing her eyes, she unlocks the door and pulls it open, her knuckles clutching the handle tightly. But she waits.

“Nancy.”

“ *Nance* .”

“I don’t - I don’t get what you’re trying to do, but...”

“ You said we could leave at 11 - come on, don’t be so stupid, he just wants to get in your pants ...”

“...maybe I can help.”

Nancy stares into the eyes of her reflection. “Get in the car.”

“What?”

“Just get in!” she calls out. “Let’s go.”

Staring straight ahead, Nancy pulls into the driveway Robin directs her to, arms outstretched at the wheel. “I can’t focus on... on anything. I can’t do what I need to do, and I need to - I just - I can’t live like this.”

Robin stares out her window. “So what are you going to do?”

“I want to find this guy. Where he might be hiding. I want to stop him.”

“Ah, okay. By yourself then?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Nancy relaxes into her seat. “I mean, the police aren’t doing *anything* . They’re letting this happen, over and over and over. We’re just waiting for him to strike again.”

Robin shakes her head quietly, air whistling out of her nose in some sick amusement. “You’re gonna get yourself killed, Wheeler.”

“Maybe.”

“Let me help you.”

“Get myself killed?”

“I think you’ll do that anyway, so, sure. I’ll be your backup plan.”

“You’re sick.” Nancy shakes her head. “Um, no, you don’t have to do this.”

“It’s alright. I don’t have much better to do, and I’m tired of sitting at home on my ass every day with everything at school being cancelled.”

Okay, so, she isn’t budging. Shit. “Robin... really, it’s okay. I don’t, uh, want you to get hurt working with me.”

“Seems inevitable.”

“Robin - “

“Nancy.” Robin turns to her finally, expression exhausted. “She was my friend too.”

Ouch. “I mean, um...”

“Listen, I won’t get in your way, I promise. I’ll be super helpful and you can be the martyr if it comes down to it.”

Nancy rolls her eyes. “Sounds like there’s no stopping you.”

“Nope.”

“Alright, fine. Meet me after school tomorrow?”

“I’ll see you then.”

Their time at the library is relatively peaceful. And short-lived.

It’s a few days of sitting at opposite ends of the same old wooden table, gradually scooting closer and carefully pulling different sources the other had found toward each other to look over. Nancy bumps her feet against Robin’s leg once and proceeds to shift about three feet to her right. Robin rolls her eyes.

They even sit next to each other at lunch, albeit stiffly, exchanging theories and jotting notes on what they find significant in old articles.

It’s on day three that Robin breaks their lull.

She slaps an old newspaper article down in front of Nancy at their

shared table. “Look at this.”

Nancy lifts the old, wilting paper into her line of vision. “This is from twenty years ago.”

“Yeah, exactly. Read it.”

The article headline is about some old serial killer who was the worst living terror in Hawkins history. Some student who was rumored to have killed up to fifteen other kids, but that number was never confirmed; everyone had heard at least a little bit of the story at this point, as he held the record as the last serial homicide case in Hawkins in two decades.

“Okay, I read it. Everyone remembers him, so, what’s your point?”

Robin slides into the chair next to Nancy’s, takes the paper from her hand, and points at the first paragraph in the article. “It says here that he was charged for seven deaths, all between thirteen and eighteen.”

“Okay...” Nancy leans forward to skim through the article, pushing Robin’s hand out of the way. “Again, this was already solved. Didn’t he get the death penalty?”

“Yeah, but it’s the same pattern as what’s going on now, don’t you see? He killed seven high school kids in less than two months. Variety of methods.”

“That doesn’t mean anything.”

“Sure it does.” Robin looks up from the paper to Nancy’s face. “This person could be a copycat. We just have to follow this guy’s pattern. I mean we’re already on number -”

“Six.” Nancy’s mind begins to race with thoughts of this killer, his face, his tactics, the cruelty involved in a murder. “We just got to six.”

“Which means number seven could come at any time.”

Nancy grips tightly at her sleeves, a sudden chill trickling down her

spine. “So, what are we supposed to do with this? Take it to the police?”

“I don’t think we can,” Robin says, frowning, “they would think it’s stupid.”

“I mean, yeah, I’m not entirely convinced.”

“But it’s better than nothing, right?” The girl starts to push out from the table, stretching out her legs, looking at Nancy eagerly. “This is the only lead we have.”

“Right...” Nancy picks up the paper again, looking at the discussions of his sentencing, public response, everything. “Do you have any kind of plan, then?”

Robin’s quiet for a minute. She looks at Nancy, lips pressed together.

“ *What?*”

“I think we should look into where this guy was living.”

Nancy scoffs into an actual laugh. “Why would we do that? Is it even open to the public?”

“I don’t know, but we could find out.” Robin leans forward on her knees. “I mean, who knows what we’d find in this guy’s house? A motive? Evidence? Our killer in the flesh?”

“And you don’t think the police would’ve looked into that?”

Robin raises an eyebrow. “Do you? All they’ve told us is he’s a maniac. We could find something real.”

“So you’re serious about this?” Nancy looks between the girl’s eyes, maybe hoping for some sign that she’s joking, that she’s not proposing what she is. Maybe just the opposite. Robin nods. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“This is all we’ve got.”

Robin breaks into a strange smile. “We’re gonna be great, Wheeler.”

“Whatever.”

It only takes half an hour in their next day of research to find out that their original serial killer had been holed up in an old warehouse about thirty miles out of town.

“We have to get out there and fast. He could be planning his next kill at this very moment, and who knows if we’ll find anything here,” Nancy says.

“Honestly, he’s probably been planning for a while.”

“True. So we have to come up with something quick.”

“How the hell are we gonna get out of town with everyone on such high guard?”

“It’s not rocket science.” A pang hits Nancy’s heart out of nowhere, drawing her back to a memory of about a year ago, a time when she was dragging Barb along to a stupid party, hiding it from their parents. “Here’s what I think.”

Robin stays over for dinner at the Wheeler’s that night. It’s a pleasant evening; Nancy’s mom is happy to have some company, distracting her from their typical dinners as of late, which were often dreary and filled with dragging conversation, heavily supplied by her brother, Mike, and their little sister prattling on about Kindergarten. So blissfully unaware of the weight surrounding their table.

She was finally big enough to sit in a real chair. The one Barb often occupied before when she stayed over. The one her mother left open for Robin now, propping Holly up on a stool.

Nancy’s mom smiles the whole time and steals glances over at her, utterly pleased that she’d found another friend - well, if you could call them friends - and wasn’t spending another dreadful night locked

alone in her room.

At least, in the worst-case scenario, she'd have a happy last memory of her daughter.

"Thank you so much for the dinner, Mrs. Wheeler. Your pie was amazing."

"Aw, well it's a pleasure having you over, Robin. Please, feel free to drop by anytime."

"Thanks, that means a lot."

"Thanks, mommy," Nancy says sweetly, dropping her plate in the kitchen, and giving her a kiss on the cheek. Karen smiles and whispers, "I like her," in return.

Something about it makes Nancy's face flush, but she ignores it and walks with Robin to the front door, closing it shut behind her, her hand resting lightly on the handle.

"Are you ready for this?"

"Ready as I'll ever be." Robin chuckles shakily. "I can't believe we're gonna do this. It's probably the stupidest thing we'll ever do, one way or another."

"Well, we have to live a little before we graduate. If the most exciting thing I ever did in high school was beat Robin Buckley for the title of valedictorian, I'm gonna lose my mind."

"Yeah, you wish. You'll have to catch up in history if you want to stand a chance."

"Oh, I will. Mrs. Dunseith loves me."

"Yeah, because you're oh-so-charming." Robin taps Nancy's chin with her knuckle in a teasing gesture. "Well, I'll see you tomorrow."

Nancy watches as she bustles down their driveway to her bike, lifting a few fingers to her face, trailing down to her chin. The girl kicks off and starts to pedal into the night.

“Be careful!”

“As always, Wheeler.” She salutes and then disappears into the darkness.

Nancy blinks her eyes open to a tapping on her window, her cheek squished against a textbook. The clock reads 11:47. She grips her sheets and slowly pushes herself up, slides off the side of the bed, and moves to look and see who or what is there. If maybe a branch from the nearby tree was just overgrown and beating against the glass again.

Instead, she finds Robin resting against her windowpane.

She slides the window open, a tacky smell wafting through with the wind. Nancy winces.

“God, Robin, were you smoking?”

“That would be a positive, Wheeler,” she says breathily. “Damn, that was a ride.”

“What’re you doing here?”

The girl wanders through her room, slightly unbalanced, and braces herself on the back of the chair at Nancy’s vanity. “Uh,” she sighs, “I shouldn’t’ve... I thought I’d relax, you know. But I feel worse. I don’t know how to say it, but,” she clears her throat, “you, uh, you were closer to home.”

Nancy’s brow furrows as she tries to make sense of Robin’s words. She’d never really smoked weed before, only hung around Steve when he did. “Do you need water? Something to eat?”

Robin waves her hand loosely. “Nah. God, this was a mistake.”

“You don’t have to go tomorrow if you don’t want to. Uh - no hard feelings.” Except now when Nancy thinks about it, she does kind of want a partner with her. To have her back. To share her relief if she *did* happen to find something. Someone who’d worked with her for

this.

Robin just chuckles. "No, it's fine. I just smoked too much." Perhaps realizing she'd just been standing there stiffly for a few moments, she drags the chair out against the carpet and takes a seat. Stares at herself in the mirror. "This is weird, Wheeler. Do you ever feel... like, unreal?"

"What do you mean?"

"Like. Like you're just watching yourself go through life. Not really...living it. Like, you're seeing and feeling every, like, movement of your hands, and it's like a movie that isn't really about you?"

Nancy moves to sit across from her on the bed, pulls her ankles up under her knees. "I feel like that a lot now. It's scary."

Robin nods. "It's not good." She winces and digs the heels of her hands into her eyes. Nancy studies her reflection. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come by. I just, I couldn't be with my friends right now, and I couldn't be alone..." As an afterthought, she tacks on, "I'm usually more fun. I swear."

Nancy smiles a little when she imagines Robin giggling like Steve always did, overexcited by small things, theorizing over details in movies, touching and teasing her, and laughing and laughing and laughing. "It's okay. There will be other days."

"Hopefully."

"Hopefully."

It's weird having Robin in her room so late. Uncomfortable - almost. Though it's difficult, she tries to put herself in the girl's shoes; find the level of desperation or anxiety or *whatever* that would bring her to her not-friend's house at midnight.

It's not a great state of mind. She doesn't feel right sending Robin home.

And maybe she doesn't want to be alone tonight, either.

Nancy clears her throat and stretches a thin smile across her face. “Uh, Robin, why don’t you stay over? If you don’t want to be alone, you can, um, stay for the night.”

Robin finally turns from the mirror, removes her hands from her eyes, and pauses as her gaze seems to refocus. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Okay.”

“Cool.”

“You can lie down if you want. I’ll go get you some water, okay?”

“Thanks.”

Careful not to wake anyone at this hour, Nancy pads down the stairs and gathers a glass and some crackers for the girl to snack on.

When she returns, Robin is tucking herself under Nancy’s comforter, holding onto the hem of the blanket. Nancy places the sustenance on her bedside table next to her, and moves to the other side of the bed, sliding into her own spot silently.

“We’ll be okay,” she mutters, after a few moments of silence.

“I think so, too.”

Nancy nods. “And if we’re not?”

A few beats of silence. “Nothing we can do at that point.”

Nancy sits up. “Do you think we should write a note or anything?”

“Then you’re basically admitting it’s a suicide mission.” Robin snorts at this, which seems a tad inappropriate, but Nancy lets it go.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” She settles back down against her pillow.
“Well, goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Nancy,” Robin breathes, her eyes closed now, head lolling back on the pillow. Nancy kills the lights and tries to ease her

mind into a restful enough state to sleep. With someone beside her, someone there to fight off the evil with her, it's a bit easier than normal, if still a challenge.

Nancy wakes to light bleeding into her room and a soft snore against her shoulder. It's confusing at first, the sound of another person, until she recalls the previous night. Pieces together that Robin is currently passed out against her back, arm slung over her waist, breath steadily washing over the back of her neck.

She stills. It's been a while since she had a sleepover with anyone, and by anyone, she thinks of Barb, the only person she typically shared a bed with. Sharing covers, stories, breaths. It feels wrong until it doesn't. Then, it's eerily comforting.

She allows herself to settle into the touch of another human. She'd shied away from comforting hugs from her mom recently, tucked herself into her room alone, even ignored Steve's calls, until they officially stopped going out. Gotten used to the feeling of being totally isolated. The absence of other life.

She closes her eyes again. Breathes in and out with Robin. Allows herself to enjoy it, relish in it, even dares to lay her hand over Robin's, the touch washing over her lonely body like a holy grail, and she lets out a tiny sigh of relief.

And so she lies there. Feels a little guilty. Comforted, more than anything. Waits until the clock hits 7. Slowly peels herself from the cocoon of the girl's body, causing Robin to roll onto her back; she frowns slightly, coughing into the stuffy air of the morning.

"Robin," Nancy says softly. She receives a grunt in response. "We have to get up. Get ready for school."

"Shit," Robin sighs. "Alright."

Nancy gets dressed in a loose grey sweater and jeans on one side of the room, while Robin fixes her pants and ties her shoes back on.

"Do you have another shirt I could wear?" She glances toward

Nancy's wardrobe. "Or, do you think Mike would let me borrow something?"

Nancy smiles. "Yeah, he fits your style more."

"Don't hate."

"Not at all. I'll see what I can do."

So, Nancy slips into her brother's room, relieved to see that he'd seemingly passed out in the basement again. She grabs the first clean shirt she can find, a simple blue tee, that, she thinks, might match Robin's eyes. Not that that really matters on a murder mission.

"Here. You wore a jacket, right?" she says upon returning. Robin looks up from the mirror, where she was fixing her hair.

"Yeah, thanks." She starts to pull off her current shirt, and Nancy quickly turns away, moving to check her bookbag's contents for the day. As she packs it back up, she steals one quick glance, of the girl's shoulders, her midriff in the reflection, her hair tousled from the impact. Her cheeks burn and she immediately turns away, avoiding that side of the room for several moments.

"Well, I guess I'll slip out now," Robin says, standing to pull a red windbreaker on. "I'll see you after school?"

"I'll see you. Wait for me."

"Don't have much of a choice."

"Whatever."

Nancy makes her bed, then gathers her things for school and heads out of her room, looking around at what were perhaps the day's last moments of peace.

When she goes to bound down the stairs, she catches Mike on his way up, face crinkled with fatigue. "Was that Robin Buckley I just saw in our driveway?" he mumbles.

Nancy nods. "Uh, yeah, she was here for our project." More lying.

“Oh. I thought she left.”

“Yeah, uh, she came back. She needed something for our poster.”

“Okay. Whatever.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

The day goes by in a blur, mostly because Nancy can't focus her mind on the nonsense her teachers were still trying to push on them, watching their weary faces anxious to hear about another dead or dying. No one seems quite right, but Nancy, for the first time in weeks, feels slightly hopeful. A thread of energy keeps her going through the day.

And then the moment comes.

Nancy rushes out of the doors at the end of the day, one of the first to hit the parking lot. Sure to avoid some traffic, thank god. Robin was to meet her outside city limits; both were to call home and say they were headed to the other's after school for finishing touches on their project. Find a phone later on and say they might need to stay the night, but they'd be home tomorrow.

And hopefully, they would.

It wasn't the best plan, given the circumstances, and she was sure her mother would protest a sleepover as much as she was sure that she could convince her it was fine, that she'd be safe. Robin seemed to think her parents would let it be, which concerned her slightly, but better for their plan.

After Nancy hangs up the landline outside of school with her mom, she hops in her car, and proceeds on the backroads drive out of town. Plenty of dirt and trees and even some frost greets her along the way.

Finally, she reaches the meeting place they'd agreed upon - Robin was to take the bus and wait there - and sure enough, there the girl

sat, waiting by an old city sign.

“I was starting to get worried you wouldn’t make it. I mean, I know how much you like to speed, so when you took the *normal* twenty minutes, my god - “

“Just shut up and get in,” Nancy says, but she’s laughing, and has to force herself to wipe the smile off her face once Robin climbs in.

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

When they pull into the gravelly parking lot about 45 minutes later, the sun is already preparing to lower itself into the horizon. An uncomfortable pang twists in Nancy’s gut as they stare at the abandoned building in front of them.

“This is stupid.”

“It might be incredibly stupid. But what if we save the Hawkins population, Wheeler? We’ll be famous.”

The joke lands stiffly between them, but Nancy barks out an awkward laugh. It hadn’t really set in with her that their current killer really could be residing here, if he was committed enough to the copycat role, or simply hiding out from town. Nothing else is this far out. She was riding on the high of maybe being able to find clues, something *worth* taking to the police.

But now, reality settles into her skin, making its home there to haunt her. “I mean, we might find nothing. Maybe we’ll be dead by the end of the night.”

“Personally loving the current odds.”

“Totally.”

Robin pats her thighs in a funny little rhythm, amping herself up. “Well, it’s now or never. We’re losing daylight.”

“Yep. Um,” Nancy taps her fingers on the wheel, “maybe I should park out on the road a bit, y’know? I mean, it looks empty right now, but...” she finishes, “I know, I’m being paranoid.”

“Oh. Well, yeah, if someone does show up...”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, yeah, we can walk a little bit.”

So Nancy backs out and parks in a little tuffet of bushes and trees, partially concealed by some long branches. “Here goes nothing.”

The warehouse, a decrepit old white thing on the outside, is all concrete, splintered wood, and rusted metal inside. Cracked windows allow the last dregs of daylight in, casting shadows along the walls. Work tables are scattered throughout, tools for art and building strewn across the surfaces, tall cabinets creating aisles along the length of the building.

Nancy and Robin wander in different directions, maintaining a close distance, examining the contents of the tables and walls. Nancy trails her fingers along some of the more compelling parts of the giant room, old screws and papers and bills fading with age.

“This is so goddamn creepy.”

“It’s terrible,” Nancy agrees.

“This can’t be his main room, though, right? Unless they took everything for evidence.”

“Well, they probably took most of it. But maybe there’s still something. Something they would’ve missed.”

“Maybe.”

The further they investigate, the more Nancy doubts that their plan would provide anything of relevance to the current predicament. Only shelves of old tools and notebooks await their attention, and as

much as she wants to believe in Robin's research, she grows antsy to leave. There's nothing here for them.

But, to respect their only lead, and out of desperation to find something, *anything*, to help find Barb's killer, Nancy marches on.

As it gets darker, she tosses Robin a spare flashlight from her backpack, pulling out her own and navigating further into the confines of the warehouse with it. Closer to the back, as she's pulling open old metal drawers, she calls out, "Look! Here."

On the table closest to her, she presses creases out of old newspapers stuffed into the drawer. "He was writing... taking notes on what they got wrong."

"Well, how fucking smug is he."

"Really." Otherwise, nothing new pops out on the page, so Nancy wanders back to the set of drawers, pulling them open and shut until she comes across something that makes her stomach drop. "Robin."

"Huh?"

"It's his yearbook." Robin appears at her side, peering over her shoulder at the faces. A series of exes and ohs marks what seems to be his successful and hopeful kills, respectively. Small notes are written by a few of the girls' faces. "Oh god."

Something about seeing the smiling faces, senior portraits awaiting future college or career plans, eyes illuminated by youth, has Nancy bracing herself against the table. "This is sick."

"It's a lot."

"Yeah." A painful thought crosses her mind, one that twists all her insides together into a puddle until she feels sick. "What if our guy has one like this? Calling Barb a whore? Saying she deserved it..."

"I guess we'll find it if it's out here." Nancy turns to find Robin grimacing, expression deflated as she looks at the faces. "Come on, let's keep looking."

And thank god they turn when they do, as it gives them a bit of a head start against the headlights bearing down on the warehouse.

“ *Shit* .”

Pure adrenaline pushes Nancy to pull Robin’s hand and drag her down the length of the building, nearly tripping over her own feet, and barreling down a set of steps. She slams a rickety slab of metal blocking off the doorway just as someone reaches the entrance. A voice calls out to the sound, shouting, “Who’s there?” Moving in choppy, panicked gestures, Nancy turns and catches her head on a rusty metal pole at the top of the doorway leading downstairs, and her voice catches on a small, ‘fuck.’

The walls of the narrow space ebb and flow and it’s only the guidance of Robin holding her wrist and whispering, “Follow me, follow me,” that keeps her steady as her heart pumps out of its chamber, expecting a chase, terrified of what they’ll have to do if this guy finds them. Dreading what they might not be able to do.

Stars glide along the floor, the walls, the ceiling around them, buried in darkness. Robin clutches Nancy’s hand in a death grip, leading her around on a light foot until she manages to find a tiny light source in the corner of this dank basement, illuminating the space around them. Nancy makes out a compact concrete area, short ceilings, small puddles forming in the dents of the ground, but many other details are blocked by the sensation of warm, thick blood flowing in her left eye.

“Sit, come on, you’re going to fall.” Robin takes hold of Nancy’s other forearm, helping her stumble along into a sitting position in a dry spot next to the wall. She makes quiet shushing noises, and Nancy shuts her eyes tight and presses her lips together to keep from moaning at the throbbing above her brow. It is, to say the least, excruciating. She takes in slow, deep breaths, and fixates on the sensation of her abdomen and chest rising and falling to deflect from the pain.

Silently, they listen to investigative footsteps circling the different areas of the upstairs, and Nancy would try to make out if he’d noticed their finds upstairs, but she can’t think about dimensions or

directions or anything other than the pressure against her wrist, firm and steady. A breath in and out. Robin's free hand placed against her mouth to cover up any groans she was currently trying to bite back.

Fixated on the person above them, Robin's breath is rapid, eyes darting around to pinpoint his location, and watching that it's not their little hideout. Momentarily satisfied that he's not going to come bounding down the steps, she turns her attention to Nancy fully, searching her face and letting out a shaky breath. She removes her hand from Nancy's lips.

"Okay, um - shit, Wheeler, what the hell did you do here?" Robin becomes preoccupied with the spot above Nancy's eyebrow, brushing back her hair to find the site of the wound. Nancy wants to squeeze her eyes shut, rest her head back against the wall, bite down on her hand to distract from the pain slicing down her forehead. But she keeps them open for now, afraid of what will happen if she succumbs to the drowsiness.

"Uh..." gently, Robin rubs the sleeve of her windbreaker against Nancy's cheek, swiping away at excess blood, "alright." She shimmies the jacket off, pulls away Mike's t-shirt, and zips the jacket back up against her bare skin. After folding sloppily, Robin places one hand on the back of Nancy's head and presses the fabric firmly against the wound.

From this distance, breaths are practically exchanged. Robin frantically turns her head every few seconds to check on the door. And, in this groggy, trapped state, Nancy decides she can fully look at Robin.

She watches her reactions carefully. The breath whistling out of her mouth, the rise and fall of her chest, her teeth biting down on her bottom lip till she nearly bleeds. Dimples pop out on her cheeks from the expression.

"How's that feeling?" Robin adjusts her grip, cupping Nancy's cheek to hold her in place.

"Awesome."

“Haha. I’m serious. I mean, everything’s so rusty down here so you could get tetanus, and - ”

“It’s fine. I, uh, I’m caught up on shots.”

“Oh. Good. Because I knew a girl back in middle school who got it, and she couldn’t open her mouth for, like, a week.”

“Thanks.”

“Mhm.” Consciously or not, Robin strokes her cheek in a soothing manner. “What are we gonna do?”

“Uh...” Nancy, thoughts swimming through gelatin to reach the surface of her mind, groans as she tries to pull herself into better posture. “All we can do is wait him out.”

“Yeah,” she nods, “you’re in no shape to be a fighter, kid.”

Nancy relaxes her eyes again, feeling lighter than before. “I’m older than you.”

“That’s meaningless. ‘Kid’ is universal.”

“Hmm.” Through the haziness, though her limbs are full of lead, Nancy lifts a few fingers to her forehead, only opening her eyes when the slippery surface jolts her back to reality. “Robin,” she murmurs, somewhat pathetically.

“Hey, hey, it’s gonna be fine. Just focus on me, okay? Look at me.”

Peeling her eyes open once again - it’s more of a chore with every second - Nancy hones in on Robin’s face in the dim light. Shadows paint her cheeks, and her eyes appear to glow, though maybe that’s just Nancy’s imagination. The girl, daring to remove the shirt momentarily, dabs a few times as gently as she can.

Stabbing pain is the last thing Nancy registers before blackness consumes her vision.

Waking with a start, Nancy places her hands on the ground, pawing around for something familiar and only finding cold. With every little movement, her head starts to pound, but she forces herself to wake up, figure out where she is, how to get out.

This feels wrong.

“Oh, thank god.”

Buckley? “Robin?” she whispers, still struggling to make sense of anything. Still struggling to open her eyes again. “W -” then she remembers, “how long was I out?”

“Just a few minutes, thankfully. You scared me.”

“Sorry.” It’s only at the sound of laughter that Nancy can finally start to blink her eyes open. “What?”

“It’s okay,” the girl says, trying to stay quiet, burying her face into her forearms, which are currently rested on her knees. “Oh my god. This is so trippy.”

“Huh?”

“I thought you were a goner for a second there. I thought I killed you or something.”

Nancy considers this. “I don’t think it would’ve been on you.”

“Still,” Robin wheezes, some sort of panic pushing hushed laughter out of her. “I mean, I can’t believe I’m gonna die in this shithole with Nancy ‘the priss’ Wheeler.”

Slowly but surely peeling the bookbag from her back, and ignoring the feeling of cotton in her head, Nancy manages a smile. “Cool nickname.”

“Sounds like sarcasm to me. I’d like to hear you come up with a better one.”

“Hmm... Robin...” she lifts a bottle of water she’d packed to her lips, taking slow sips. Almost instantly, she feels some of the fog floating

away. “Robin ‘Dorkley.’”

“Yowza! That stings, Wheeler. I don’t think my heart can take it.” It’s the quietest bout of cackling Nancy’s ever heard, but nonetheless.

“Oh, shut up. You just nearly killed me.”

“Ah, but I wouldn’t have succeeded with these healing skills, this is top-notch.” She gestures to the blood-soaked t-shirt, which Nancy grimaces at. “Not on my watch. You lost a lot of blood, though, so take it easy.”

“Don’t have much of a choice.” Nancy offers the water bottle to Robin, who takes it gratefully. “Is he still here?”

“I think so. But it’s been quiet. Maybe he thought the slam was just the wind?”

Doubtful, Nancy nods, just to try to calm Robin down a little bit. She’d caused a bit of a panic in their first bit of hiding, so she figures she maybe owes her some reassurance. “Yeah, maybe.” She digs through the backpack, sighing happily when her fingers find the crackers from last night, and a few granola bars that she’d packed this morning to be safe. “If that’s the case, hopefully we can just camp out until he leaves again.”

“Yeah, for sure.” Robin accepts the extra snack bar, tearing off pieces and gnawing on them. “Nancy?”

“Yeah?”

Wiping her hands off on her pants, and keeping her eyes trained down on her hands as she fusses, Robin says, “Just - just in case something happens, um, not that I think it will - you’re fine, obviously - but, just in case this ends poorly...”

Nancy squints her eyes in an attempt to focus better on the girl’s rambling. “What?”

“I need you to know that I don’t hate you anymore.”

And it’s so absurd, out-of-nowhere, Nancy breaks into a small laugh.

“I never really hated you, Robin.”

“I hated you.”

“Oh.” Her heart immediately sinks all the way down to her knees. She doesn’t know why and she doesn’t like it. “Why?”

Bitter. Her words come out bitter, derived from anger. Maybe pain. “You were just so perfect. You fit in with all the jocks, the popular kids, their stupid little cliques. But then, you were so goddamn humble and so *smart*. All the geeks are in love with you, and you have all these guys fawning over you. Teachers love you, even when you’re lying. Perfect little Nancy Wheeler.”

“Yeah, well what about you? Perfect grades, on the soccer team, star player in softball, even in goddamn theater. And that debate club. You’re bound to get into any school you want.” Nancy softens slightly, picking at her fingernails. “I don’t really have extracurriculars going for me. But you’re good at everything you can get your hands on.”

Robin stiffens. “I didn’t know you paid attention to any of that.”

“Of course I did. I went to your shows, you know. You have a nice voice.”

“Oh, god,” Robin chokes on a bit of awkward laughter, “those shows were horrible. I can’t believe you came.”

“Steve too. He thought you were great.”

“Tell him thanks,” Robin clears her throat, lifts her eyes to Nancy’s face, “but it wasn’t his attention I was aiming for.”

Suddenly threatened by the weight of the girl’s gaze, Nancy ventures, “Well, you have my full attention now.”

“Something of a captive audience.”

“Nonetheless.”

An amused breath falls from Robin’s nose, her eyes trained on the

floor. “Can I tell you something that might make you start hating me?”

“Okay.”

As though preparing herself, Robin nods, shifts into a criss-cross-applesauce sitting position, and squares herself across from Nancy. “As much as I hated you because you had all this luck with friends and love and popularity, and I *did* hate that, I hated you the most because even though you were apparently ‘friends with everyone,’ you refused to speak to me.” She manages to shift her gaze to the wall behind Nancy. “I was friends with Barb. Met her in debate. And she was such a great person to talk to, so funny, so *good*. Part of me thought maybe if you saw that someone like her didn’t hate someone like me, you’d try.” Nancy drops her eye to the floor at the mention of Barb. But she listens. “But you didn’t. And I didn’t. Maybe I hated myself for that. So then, I thought, competing with you in class, somewhere that we’re equal, might get your attention. But it just pissed you off even more.”

“A little, yeah.”

“Yeah.” A smile plays on Robin’s face. “I felt invisible. And all I wanted was to be seen by you.”

It’s so much. Nancy’s brain is swimming in confusion, considering all of Robin’s words, all of her pain, her resentment. More heartbreak that she had caused.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. Please.” A painful frown takes over Robin’s face. “This is all a lead-up to me telling you that I liked you, beneath it all.”

“I-I like you too, Robin. I mean, it surprised me, but - “

A pained look wrecks the girl’s face, and suddenly lead drowns Nancy’s insides.

She’d never spoken that kind of thing out loud.

She hadn’t even mentioned it to Barb.

It's eerie, how Robin sees right through her.

"Oh."

"Oh."

"You know, um..." The words slip Nancy's mind, anything to vocalize what she means to say. All that's left is a brick of confusion.

It's difficult.

Before now, impossible, but what the hell is she going to do? She's stuck down here, and anyway, who could Robin tell without risking her own secrets?

"Barb and I, we had a, um, weird relationship in that sense." It's as if she's swallowed gallons of glue; her brain frantically tries to stop the thoughts from connecting with her tongue, but she pushes past it. "When we were younger, we'd practice 'kissing boys' on each other. We never talked about it later on. And then we just stopped."

Robin considers all of this silently, and anxiety seeps into Nancy's chest, threatening her ability to breathe, but then the girl breaks into a small smile. "Damn, you got to kiss *the* Barb Holland?" She muses, "Do you think she would've considered me?"

And maybe it's the absurdity of the whole conversation, or that this is the first time someone has smiled at the mention of Barb in over a month instead of treating her whole existence as a tragedy, but it lifts Nancy to the moon.

"I definitely think she would've kissed you."

Robin just looks at her, unable or unwilling to respond.

"Did you ever kiss a girl, Robin?"

"No," she says after a few moments, voice riddled with nerves. "Well, not really. A few of my friends got really curious when we were young, too, but we were just kids. It was silly."

"Really silly."

“Totally silly.”

A silence settles between them, thicker than before; but Nancy feels more awake than she did prior to injuring herself. Curious about the conversation. Intentions. A bunch of little meanings hidden in their delicate language.

And it takes little more than the newly welcoming smile on Robin’s face for Nancy to push off the wall and crawl a few feet closer, heart pounding, and, though the girl responds, tentatively leaning forward till they’re nearly in contact, ask a quiet, “Can I?”

In response, Robin nods, breathes a quiet, “Yes,” against her lips, and Nancy pushes in and connects them. This first kiss lasts an instant, but its effects are intoxicating, a desperate *want* bleeding through Nancy’s veins as they pull apart, warm breath washing over her tender lips. When her eyes flutter open, she sees Robin, a pink flush cast across her cheeks, tongue sliding across her mouth, composing herself.

But for once, as opposed to her first few first dates, she doesn’t want composition or a polite, proper ending to a chaste night.

She wants to see the girl unraveled.

This time, Nancy leans further into Robin’s space, letting the effects of wanting take over hesitation. She *wants* to hold Robin’s face, to kiss her till her lips are sore; she *wants* to get her damn jacket off, *wants* to listen to her hushed, trembling breaths as they push closer together.

With Robin comes a certain tenderness, one born from warmth, from heat; she trails her fingers up Nancy’s back lightly, but when her fingertips find their way back down to her hips, she pulls Nancy flush against her. Falls onto her back, letting out a quiet, high-pitched sigh in the brief space between them.

A million little nerves fire off in Nancy’s body and everything is telling her to keep going, *don’t stop*, but then her head starts up a light stream of blood again, some of it dripping against Robin’s temple, and Nancy pulls back, mortified.

“Shit.” She sits up quickly, too quickly, and the pain snaps her head in half. “Sorry.”

Robin, catching her breath, touches her hand to her mouth, and then repeats, “Shit.” She pushes herself into a sitting position, lets Nancy awkwardly shift off her lap, and wipes the drops of blood away with the back of her hand. “Alright, you gotta sit still, we can’t have you bleeding out right now.”

Nancy resumes her position against the wall, a stupid smile taking over her features, as her head dances between pain and bliss. “Hey, Robin?”

“Yeah?”

“You never were invisible to me, by the way.”

Robin rolls her eyes but smiles back. “Don’t get a big head about it.” She pats around until she finds their bottle of water and lifts it to Nancy’s face. “So, it seems we’ll be here overnight.”

“Hopefully our parents don’t lose their minds.”

“Probably are already. But we can’t think about that. We just have to get back to them, and maybe they won’t kill us.”

Nancy laughs. “Yeah. Uh, I know I don’t feel great about us both sleeping, or not resting at all.” Robin nods in assent. “So maybe we take turns getting rest, wake the other if something’s wrong. We can listen for if he leaves and figure out how to sneak out in the morning.”

Staring pointedly at her forehead, Robin says, “You can sleep first.”

“I feel okay for now. Really. You should try to nap.”

Robin looks like she’s going to protest, but apparently, fatigue overcomes. Maybe she’s trying to be noble and let Nancy sleep through the darker parts of the night. Either way, she shimmies her windbreaker back on and hugs herself, and, following Nancy’s suggestion to use her lap as a pillow, settles into what seems to be a semi-comfortable position.

With Robin dozing off, it gives Nancy the mental clearance to consider, *What the hell just happened?*

Okay. So she'd kissed another girl.

Robin Buckley.

Nancy can't stop thinking about what it means, for her, for her family, for her friends and life and future. Because she had really, really liked kissing Robin. Perhaps she'd thought about it before, what it would be like to kiss another girl for real, not while one was pretending they were a guy. With no inhibitions.

Now she knows the real thing is much better than anything she could've imagined.

Maybe it didn't have to mean anything. Maybe she could just go along as is, knowing she enjoyed kissing girls. Kissing Robin.

Maybe she didn't have to define it for the world just yet.

A few hours go by, and when Nancy can't keep her eyes open anymore, and her head is positively throbbing, she taps the girl's shoulder until she wakes up.

They switch positions, and Nancy passes out with Robin gently carding her fingers through her hair.

Nancy doesn't dream. When she wakes, a tiny crack near the ceiling that peeks aboveground alerts her to the fact that it must be early, early morning. Dawn.

"Robin?" she says quietly. As her senses come back to her, it's obvious that her head is against the direct cold floor, neck bent at a horrific angle, and when she tries to move, an ache pulls at the crook in her neck. Upon realizing Robin isn't there, ice seeps into her system and tangles through her whole body. "Shit. Shit shit shit."

She pulls herself against the wall to stand, squeezes her eyes tight as lines dance across her vision, and takes a few sips of water. It's

almost out.

Okay, she thinks. I would've heard a scream. She has to be okay.

But would she have? With the weight of her head, she passed out within minutes. Who knows if she was in a deep enough state to have heard a quick, piercing death scream?

No. She has to be alive.

Nancy packs her bookbag quickly, mind racing, and throws it across her back. Every second counts.

In this state, she's terrified of meeting this man. She can barely walk without everything spinning, let alone fight. And even if, by some chance, it wasn't their killer - just some groundskeeper, state worker, any other possible soul out here - he might not be a great person. Particularly if he's kidnapped Robin.

Whipping her brother's t-shirt in circles until it's long and thin enough to act as a bandage, Nancy ties it tight against her forehead at an angle, slowly moving across the basement. As she moves along, she finds the trail of blood she'd left the night before, and tries to make out any odd footprints, but can't.

Tiptoeing up the stairs, she braces herself to pull open the slat of metal acting as a door. She takes in a deep, silent breath, and pushes against it as quietly as she can.

She's immediately embraced by bright sunlight flooding in through the tall windows. Nancy curses in her head. There's no hiding here. Everything out in the open.

Well, good. Hopefully, this will go by fast.

Keeping her back to the wall, weaponless, she moves in swift, unsteady steps, her palms providing some stability.

It would be stupid to call out for the girl. But the silence is weighing her down - no sounds of struggle, no signs of life.

A curling, icy feeling hits her in the gut as she moves along. What if

she doesn't find the killer? What if Robin wasn't just taken... what if she found a body?

Swallowing down the illness that threatens to give her away, Nancy pushes forward. Senses heightened, eyes darting across the aisles and crevices hidden between shelves in the giant space.

She's almost made a whole perimeter when her hand catches on a notch in the wall. When she turns, she finds a door that they'd completely missed in their initial, albeit short, search.

Fuck. If they're still here, this is where they'd be.

She can't waste another minute.

She rips the door open to find her party of two waiting. Robin, eyes as wide as a deer in headlights, though seemingly unharmed. A man with a large hoodie and gloves on, a bandana covering the bottom part of his face. But his eyes are free.

Cold. Dark. Amused.

"Well, well, well, you made it." He's grinning. Under that stupid mask lies a wicked smile. "I thought you might bleed out or something down there, decided to take this one instead. You didn't put up any kind of fight when I took her from you. Just stayed right there, dead to the world. I thought you might not come at all, but we decided - hey, we'll give her another hour or so. And look at you. You made it."

Shuddering breaths tear through her body, but she tries to hide it. This is the man who killed Barb. No kindness, no one there who cared in her final moments. A taunting little maniac.

Nancy's frozen in her stance, and she can't bear to look at him, so she watches Robin. A rag stuffed sloppily in her mouth. Puffy eyes, a bit of snot caught at the end of her nose. Attacked because of Nancy. Who laid there, dead to the world, doing fucking nothing yet again.

"I'm glad you could be part of the show."

Chills. "There won't be a show." Her voice is raw. Like she'd spent

the night screaming. Her throat is so dry, it's suffocating, and she's sure she'll choke on some spit and die in front of them, right there.

"That so?" he laughs. "Well, I guess our little plan has been for nothing, then." He pats Robin's shoulders from behind, shaking her, swooping around to look at his sick ensemble on her. "See, I thought you could be here for this one. I mean, I didn't think you cared much for each other. But then I saw you snuggled up so sweetly, and I thought, 'wow, maybe she does give a shit.'"

What does that mean? He was stalking them? Following them as they sought him out, all the way to his own little hideout?

Robin lifts her chin, to preserve some dignity, maybe. Takes a few deep breaths, to look less panicked. Less weak. If they die, they die unafraid of this asshole. This pathetic, masked idiot.

"You're not a total selfish bitch, Nancy. This is news."

"Who *are* you?"

His eyes darken. "See, I think you're decent, and then you say shit like that. People come in and out of your life and you just don't care? We don't matter unless we're doing something for you?"

Nancy's mind races through nonsensical thoughts, muddled by his taunting. "You can't pin this on me, you twisted fuck." Her voice breaks at the end. "This is your ego, not mine."

"No. This is you. This is what you do to people."

"Fuck you."

The guy pulls at Robin's hair, knife poised to create a happy little smile in her throat. Tears flooding her eyes, Nancy stares at it, careful about her next words, actions, everything. There's no fucking way he's killing Robin because of *her*.

She'll take her place if she has to.

"If this is because of me, why not just kill me?" she proposes calmly, careful to avoid excess emotion. "If I, I don't know, turned you down

for a dance, or whatever the hell, why not just take me out?"

It strikes a nerve, and she thinks she must be right, that she'd turned him down on some sort of date. Thinking through the past string of guys who'd asked her out, she tries to place this one, his stature, his eyes, his voice. Nothing comes to mind. Maybe she is that horrible. Maybe he's an entitled shit.

"I wanted to cause you pain. What you caused me."

I don't even know you. You don't know me. You don't know my life. "I never killed anyone."

"You almost killed me."

Nancy shuts her eyes tight for a minute, turning that around in her mind. "I'm sorry?"

"You know what? Fuck this. Time to move on, right Nancy?"

Nancy balls her hands into fists, frozen in time.

It's Robin, moving her hands just slightly, that brings her back to clear thought, brings her away from the mindfuck this man has to offer.

It all happens so quickly.

Intending on some sick, slow beheading, the killer presses the dagger into Robin's neck, some blood springing up from the wound. Robin frantically gestures toward his stomach, and Nancy takes a moment to realize she means for her to jump at him, dislodge him. With no weapon in hand. But what option does she have? Watch him slowly bleed Robin to death? Listen to her choking on her own blood?

Nancy takes a few steps to the right and dives forward at his abdomen, and Robin throws her head back enough to avoid a complete slice, smacking him in the stomach; his elbow catches her temple roughly, and she falls back against a shelf of small tools, cascading in the chair to the floor.

With only a moment to act, as the wind is knocked out of the guy,

Nancy grabs a fistful of what fell from the impact to that shelf - some screws and bolts - and digs the heels of her hands into his eyes, jabbing the pointy objects deep into the sockets with all the force she can muster. He screams, and with him distracted, she jumps up from his body, backing away so he can't grab or trip her, and looks for anything else that could stop him from getting up and attacking.

A paint can on the shelf jumps out at her, and, grabbing the small metal handle, she swings it down low against his cheekbone, until he stops moving. Passes out.

Body wracked by panicked breaths, she turns to Robin, who lays on the floor, unconscious. Blood gathers near the side of her head that's rested on the ground.

As though the girl is just playing a game, a stupid little game, part of the plan, Nancy begins, "Okay, come on, wake up Robin." Her hands get to work on the twist ties he'd used to keep her hands captive against the chair. She uses his knife to rip them off. "Come on, we have to go, he could wake up any second. Come on." Grunting with effort, she pushes the chair away, toward the guy, acting as a small buffer from any potential oncoming attack. Nancy gnaws on her lip, increasingly desperate, staring down at the ground in a panic. "Fuck, don't do this Robin. You're okay, please, wake up."

Her mind is spinning. Paranoid that other actors in these crimes will come busting down the doors at any moment, Nancy leans over the girl and taps on her face. "Please, please don't do this." Tears fall in a stream from her eyes onto Robin's face. "Robin, get up! This isn't funny."

Blood pools against the girl's neck, burying her complexion in red. Nancy tries to feel for a pulse, but all she feels is the blood on her fingers. A scream works its way from the back of her throat to her teeth. "Wake up! Wake up! Fuck."

She could try to drag Robin to her car, drive them back, get her to a hospital. But with her last bit of sense, she sprints outside, ignoring the floaters bleeding into the edges of her vision, until she knocks into a telephone booth and picks it up. Hands trembling, she dials the police station and waits desperately for an answer, every second

dragging on like a lifetime.

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“My name is Nancy Wheeler, I’m outside of Hawkins, at this old supply warehouse. My friend is bleeding. We were attacked.” The words spill out in any little order, and the ground is swimming, and she can barely focus on giving the last details to the operator as they ask. Finally, she’s told someone would be there to help as soon as possible. As soon as possible.

As soon as possible.

Just stay there. Don’t move. Don’t try to move your friend, that could cause a lot of damage. Just stay right there. Right there. Everything is alright. We’ll have someone right there. Just stay calm. Stay calm.

Nancy stumbles back into the warehouse, leaving the door open, and collapses in the room with Robin. She tries to stop the bleeding. Holds her hands against the girl’s neck. *It’s not too deep, you’ll be okay*, she tries to tell her, but she can’t get the words out. *We’ll be okay. We made it, kid.*

They’re found like that. Nancy wrapped around Robin’s body. Holding pressure against her neck. Blood all over her hands, her forearms. Shaking. Unsteady. Someone leads her outside, away from Robin, promising that they’re taking care of her. Takes her to a truck where they test her vitals, watch how she follows a light, how she’s responding.

It’s all very mechanical to her. Answering yes and no medical questions. Letting them remove her makeshift bandage, her brother’s t-shirt, treating her brow with real supplies.

For now, she’s safe from police questioning. A few men carry Robin into a similar truck to hers. Jump in the back with her, start to treat her.

Finally, she’s helped into the back of her own vehicle and told she can rest now if she’d like. They’d take care of her. Talk to her family. She was okay.

When she wakes, her mother is holding her hand.

“She’s awake,” she tells someone, maybe her father, maybe a nurse. Nancy allows light to seep into the rest of her vision.

“Wh...” Immediately, she feels the scratchiness of her throat. She tries to swallow a few times, struggling to make it work, and it almost sends her into a frenzy. Her mom squeezes her hand.

“Honey, what’s the matter?”

Nancy blinks a few times, making sense of her surroundings. A hospital bed. “Where’s Robin?” she asks, voice gravelly. “What happened?”

“She’s alright. The doctors are taking good care of her, but she’s very tired.”

Nancy tries to sit up. “So she’s awake? She’s okay?”

Her mom lays a hand against her shoulder, gently pushing her back into a lax position. “She’s fine. In and out. Her parents are here. You both took a beating.” Nancy knows, in some logical part of her mind, that her parents will be giving her the lecture of her life when she’s healed, about how she could’ve died, could’ve gotten Robin killed, about how stupid this was to do. But for now, with Nancy just waking up, she’s choosing to be kind, gentle. Nancy sighs.

“It was my idea. My fault that this happened.”

“Sweetie,” Karen strokes the normal, unwounded side of her forehead, “you can’t do that. You’re both okay. That’s what matters right now.”

“Can I see her?”

“Soon.”

“What happened to the... the guy?”

Karen presses her lips together. “He was taken care of.”

“In jail?”

“He passed away.”

Nancy frowns. “They executed him already? How long have I been out?”

“Only overnight, honey. They gave you some pain meds. But they should be able to discharge you later if everything looks okay, they said. Tomorrow morning at the latest.”

Nancy’s stuck on the killer. “Mama?”

“Yes, sweetie?”

“Did I kill him?”

“You were acting in self-defense, baby. It’s alright.”

As much as she hated this guy, something turns her stomach at the thought. It makes her head pound and her heart monitor starts beeping too much and a young nurse comes in to check on her, finally. “I didn’t mean to,” she murmurs.

“We can talk about it later, alright? For now, let’s just focus on the fact that you’re okay. You’re alive, baby.”

“Mom says you’re going to the crazy hospital.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, if it helps, I don’t think you’re crazy. That was badass. You saved everyone.”

“I guess. Don’t make it into a thing, Mike, mom would kill us both if she thought this wore off on you.”

“Hopefully I won’t have to do anything like that.”

“I hope not. I hope this is the end.”

“Here at least.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah. I think we can leave soon.”

“Okay.”

“Okay. I’ll be back.”

“Okay.”

Changing and packing doesn’t take long, as Nancy didn’t have much with her to begin with. Her mother brings fresh clothes for her discharge.

When she looks in the mirror, it’s like the furthest stranger and her closest friend gaze back at her simultaneously, greeting her with the eerie feeling of otherness. Of un-belonging. No one else could understand. She wasn’t like anybody else. Maybe she never was.

It freaks her out too much. She slams the bathroom door shut, alerting the few professionals waiting for her.

She asks to see Robin before she leaves, to say goodbye. And she avoids her reflection as she’s led to her room.

Robin looks mostly normal. A thin bandage covers her neck wound, and she’s in a hospital robe, tucked into the sheets.

Almost normal.

“Hey.”

“Hey there, Wheeler. You’re looking sharp.”

Nancy smiles for the first time in days. “Nothing compared to you, ‘Dorkley’.”

“You gotta let that die, it’s just not good.”

Nancy laughs and sits in the chair near her bed. “I’m really sorry about what happened.”

“Why? I mean, we caught the guy, and we both lived. Seems like a winning situation.” Robin’s trying to cheer her up, that has to be it. Maybe she secretly hates her.

“You could’ve died. Because of me.” She bites at her lip. “I can’t believe I didn’t wake up.”

“I want to be pissed at you for putting me through that, believe me, but I can’t,” she looks at the bandage on Nancy’s forehead, “plus, you saved me too. That makes your score pretty even.”

Maybe she really doesn’t hate her anymore. It’s almost ironic, the backwardness of it all.

“I guess.” Nancy’s legs jitter, a nervous tic. “I came to say goodbye.”

Robin tilts her head, frowning slightly. “Where are you going?”

“I, um. My parents are having me go to some psych ward place for a bit. To deal with things.” Things being her best friend being murdered and killing the same guy that did it. Just didn’t sit right, and it was enough that even her father couldn’t deny some therapy might be needed.

“Oh.”

Scrambling to not let *Robin* of all people pity her, clinging to this final shred of dignity, Nancy quickly says, “I just wanted to thank you for coming with me. I never could have done that without you. I’d probably be dead.”

“Wow,” Robin blows breath through her lips, in some kind of exasperation, “that’s a lot.”

“I know,” she says, “but you know, I’m gonna need you to get better real fast, Robin, because if I’m not valedictorian this year, it better be you.”

Searching her face, whether she'd really be gone that long, looking for answers to all the questions that Nancy had no answer to, Robin just clears her throat and smiles. "I will absolutely kick ass for you. And when you come back, just know I'm not going easy on you."

That fluttering thing kicks in her heart again.

So soon, her parents are outside to collect her. Nancy takes in the deepest breath of her life, willing herself to say goodbye to normalcy, and says, "Well, it was a pleasure doing business with you. I'll see you around."

"So long, Nancy Wheeler."

"So long."

Author's Note:

title inspired by the song of the same name btw

if you were to look at me and ask what possessed me to write this I would have nothing to tell you. hope you enjoyed though <3

in all seriousness, I was inspired by the news of robin and nancy investigating pennhurst in s4, a random scene I remember from mtv's scream years ago (I think?), and me wanting to challenge myself to write in a more serious tone/a not totally happy ending. this is also my first time writing for nancy and robin, which I was SO excited for - I hope I stayed faithful to their potential dynamic, haha. let me know what you think !!!

(ps i think I just made this killer dude a vessel by which i could throttle misogyny, I hope it at least worked lol)